

The British Horse Society issues companion horse warning

The BHS is warning people to be wary when responding to adverts seeking companion horses following an increase in the number of reports of such animals being sold onto new homes.

The Society is raising awareness of this issue as it is concerned about the welfare of such horses. Animals deemed suitable as companions often have physical reasons why they should not be ridden or their temperament may place the rider at risk.

A number of calls have been received by the BHS from concerned members who have responded to such adverts. Some months after selling their horse as a companion, the horse has been sold on to a new home as a riding horse. In some cases this appears to be a money making venture as companion horses often change hands for little or no money, but can be sold for hundreds or thousands of pounds.

Lee Hackett, BHS Welfare Senior Executive, said: "Although it only happens in a small number of cases, the increase in the number of reports of this practice we have received is worrying. We are obviously concerned for the horses and the calls we have received have highlighted how distressing this is for the animal's previous owners.

"We must stress that this is not a common occurrence and we don't seek to put people off finding homes for their horses as companions. It can be an excellent way to ensure an injured or elderly horse has a safe and permanent home."

Once a horse has been sold on there is very little that can be done so it is important to try and prevent it happening. There are a number of steps people can take if they are selling their horse for use as a companion.

Where possible, it is a good idea to go and visit the horse's potential new home and meet the animals it is going to be companion for. Their condition can be assessed and any legitimate potential purchaser is unlikely to have any concerns about this. In some cases it might also be appropriate to ask for references.

As true companion horses often change hands for free, it is worth considering whether it is really necessary to change their ownership. Putting the horse out on loan rather than "selling" it means that the original owner can maintain some control over the

animal in future. The BHS produces a template loan agreement that may prove useful in such situations.

The BHS Welfare Department can provide advice for anyone who has concerns about selling or loaning out their horse as a companion, contact them on 01926 707804.